

Reasons for Volunteering (1914)

Abstract

During the first year of the war, the Institute for Applied Psychology [*Institut für angewandte Psychologie*] in Potsdam distributed questionnaires to soldiers. The survey was rapidly banned by military censors, but some of the answers collected before the ban are insightful, particularly as to the question of why German men chose to volunteer.

Source

[...]

“On calm reflection, the great senselessness and unreasonableness of the slaughter of men became clear to me again and again. I, too, must have been driven by a sense of adventure.”

“I joined as a war volunteer out of a sense of duty. It was natural for me to enlist on the very first day. This is partly due to the national spirit that was cultivated in my student fraternity.”

“Joined as a war volunteer on the first day of mobilization. It was clear to me from the beginning that a modern war is an unparalleled tragedy and a crime against humanity. That is why I was not able to feel any real enthusiasm for the war. But the mood of the first days dictated to me as a matter of course what I had to do. My love for the fatherland had not been without reservations until then; now I recognized myself as a good patriot. [...] A strong touch of adventurousness was certainly present in this mood of the first days. [...] The second motive was ‘shame’: should I, a young man, stay at home when not only my peers, but also the *Landwehr* and *Landsturm* [militias] were going into battle? I enlisted as a volunteer on the first day so that I would no longer have to wear civilian clothes.”

“Never felt any enthusiasm for war, joined up only out of a sense of duty.”

Source of original German text: Paul Plaut, “Psychographie des Kriegers,” *Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für angewandte Psychologie* Nr. 21: Beiträge zur Psychologie des Krieges. Leipzig, 1920: 11-12. Available online at:

<https://archive.org/details/beihefte-zur-zeitschrift-fur-angewandte-psychologie-21.1920-25.1921/page/n5/mode/2up>

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